REPORT

Institute of Museum and Library Services
Advisory Meeting on Native American Library Services
January 13, 2000

The Library Services and Technology Act of 1996 (LSTA) authorizes the Director of IMLS to award grants to "Indian tribes and to organizations that primarily serve and represent Native Hawaiians" to enable such tribes and organizations to carry out the following activities:

- Establishing or enhancing electronic linkages among or between libraries;
- Electronically linking libraries with educational, social, or information services;
- Assisting libraries in accessing information through electronic networks;
- Encouraging libraries in different areas, and encouraging different types of libraries, to establish consortia and share resources; or
- Paying costs for libraries to acquire or share computer systems and telecommunications technologies; and
- Targeting library and information services to persons having difficulty using a library and to underserved urban and rural communities, including children (from birth through age 17) from families with incomes below the poverty line.

IMLS began administering the Native American Library Services program in 1997 when the library programs previously administered by the U.S. Department of Education were transferred to the new Federal agency created by the Museum and Library Services Act (which includes LSTA). IMLS awarded its first grants in the Native American program in 1998.

On January 13, 2000, IMLS convened a meeting in San Antonio, Texas, to discuss the activities of the Native American grant program to date and to invite comments from individuals with experience in different aspects of the program. The individuals invited had either received grants through the program, served as consultants or liaisons to tribal libraries, or been involved in tribal library issues through the American Indian Library Association (AILA) or through activities at the state level. This report is the result of that meeting.

Meeting participants were asked to address the following questions:

1) What are the current and future needs of the Native American library community?
2) Do the Basic, Technical Assistance, and Enhancement grants address the needs of the Native American library community?
3) How can the grant process be structured to best serve the Native American community?

What are the current and future needs of the Native American Library community?

The meeting began with a discussion of participants' views of the most pressing needs of tribal libraries. Joan Howland, University of Minnesota Law Library and conference facilitator, stressed the importance of having an open and candid discussion and encouraged everyone to participate.

The biggest need individuals identified was stable sources of funding for tribal libraries. Several participants expressed concern that the IMLS Basic grant was inadequate to support minimal levels of service, since many tribal libraries have no other sources of funding. Other needs include flexibility to use funds to provide the information services that best meet the community's requirements; education and training for library staff; streamlining the IMLS application process wherever possible; an annual meeting of tribal librarians; and creation of an infrastructure to provide assistance and coordination for tribal libraries at the national level. Identification of funding sources, such as other federal agencies and foundations, is an ongoing need. Working with state libraries or state library associations for resource sharing and technical assistance would be a valuable resource. The participants recognized that some of these issues are beyond the scope of IMLS to address.

Another issue discussed was whether tribal libraries should be considered public libraries, special libraries, or some combination of the two. The participants stressed that meeting community needs is more important than imposing strict definitions. Some tribal libraries may operate as public libraries, while others are more like special libraries or information centers. The variety of community needs underscores the necessity of permitting flexibility in use of funds as far as the law permits.

Recommendations:

- Provide maximum flexibility in administering the law;
- Encourage and facilitate resource sharing among libraries through the grants process; and,
- Simplify the IMLS application language and process as much as possible.

Do the Basic, Technical Assistance, and Enhancement grants address the needs of the Native American library community?

Lotsee Patterson, University of Oklahoma School of Library and Information Studies, and Nancy Weiss, IMLS General Counsel, provided historical background about the Native American Library Services program under LSTA and its predecessor, the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). Lotsee described the input that she and others from the tribal library community had in contributing to the LSCA amendments of 1984, which created the tribal library program. The amendment language intentionally provided flexibility in use of funds. Nancy Weiss explained that the LSTA and its amendments set forth the formula for current funding of the Native American program. The Director of IMLS is authorized to allocate 1.75% of the amount the agency receives

to grants to Indian tribes, Alaska Native villages and to organizations serving Native Hawaiians. The total amount of funds available for the Native American program is fixed and depends on the overall LSTA appropriation. Grants may be awarded only for the activities specified in the legislation and not for other purposes, such as construction.

Joyce Ray, Director of the Office of Library Services, explained administrative changes made in the Native American program when it was transferred from the Department of Education to IMLS in 1997 (with the first awards being made in 1998):

- Enhancement grants (formerly Special Project grants), the program for competitive funding, were made available for up to two years, instead of just one, to enable better planning and use of funds;
- Enhancement grants could no longer be used for construction projects because of the change in the law;
- A new category of non-competitive grants, Technical Assistance grants, was created, providing up to $2000 per tribe to enable libraries to bring in outside consultants to advise on any aspect of library assessment or planning; and,
- The disbursement of Basic grants was streamlined. Rather than having to request funds as needed, tribal libraries now receive the entire award upon submission of the electronic funds transfer form. However, there is also now an increased need for accountability under the Government Performance and Results Act. Tribes must file reports stating that all funds were spent during the grant period (no extensions are allowed), or, if any funds remain, unspent funds must be returned to IMLS. *Beginning with Fiscal Year 2001 funds, tribes that are delinquent in filing reports or returning unspent funds from previous IMLS grants will be ineligible for future IMLS grants as long as they remain non-compliant.*

How can the grant process be structured to best serve the Native American community?

The meeting then focused on each of the three grant programs individually.

Basic Grants

Terri Brown, Program Officer for Native American Library Services, reviewed the recent history of the Basic grant program. Basic grants are non-competitive and are available to Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages or corporations which are recognized by the Department of Interior. Basic grants are available only to support existing library operations. IMLS considers regularly scheduled hours, staff and materials available for library users as evidence of existing library operations. No extensions are allowed. The amount of each Basic grant has been in the range of $4,000 to $4,500 over the last several years.

Beginning in 1999, applicants for the Basic grant are also required to submit a long-range plan, which means a three-year plan identifying community needs and outlining goals, objectives and activities responding to those needs. Beginning with 2001 awards, libraries that are not compliant with program requirements to file a final report and to

return any unspent IMLS funds from previous years will not be eligible for Basic grants or any other IMLS grants as long as they remain non-compliant.

In 1996 and 1997, the last two years that the program was under the Department of Education, a total of 363 Basic grants were awarded. Of these, only 180 libraries, or less than 50%, filed final reports. In addition, 126 libraries failed to spend all funds within the grant period.

The number of libraries receiving Basic grants increased in the first two years under IMLS. In 1998, 243 tribes and villages received Basic grants. In 1999, awards were made to 205 tribes and villages. If every eligible tribe applied, more than 550 awards would be made.

In response to the concern that the Basic grant award is too small to adequately fund library programs that depend solely on it for support, the participants discussed how the Basic grant award amount could be increased. Since the funding base for the Native American Library Services program is determined by the legislative formula in LSTA, IMLS cannot increase the overall percentage of funds allocated to the Native American program. Participants did not support the idea of eliminating one or both of the other two grant categories in the program to increase the funds for the Basic grants.

Several participants suggested that it would help tribes if IMLS provided a sample long-range plan and final report, or templates to make it easier for tribes to submit required documentation. Some applicants don't have enough guidance to help them write long-range plans, and they are afraid that they will be penalized if they don't spend funds in exact accordance with their plan. Even though IMLS may interpret guidance flexibly, tribal administrators may be overly rigid in interpreting agency requirements. The group recommended that language be added wherever possible to let tribes know that funds may be reallocated to meet changing community needs without penalty, as long as they are used to benefit library services and are documented. However, the need for program accountability was also recognized.

Some participants felt that Basic grants should be available to tribes for the purpose of establishing a library. It was suggested that "information centers" might be a better term than "libraries" in defining the purposes of the Basic grant, as long as the money was being used to meet the tribe's information needs. There was some discussion about whether the LSTA statute would permit funds to be used to establish new libraries, although it was noted that the law authorizes funds for "targeting library and information services to underserved populations," which might permit a broad definition of the term library. In addition, there was discussion about whether expanding eligibility for the program would dilute the amount of each grant so much as to make it meaningless. Some participants suggested that, based on the history of the program, this might not be a problem, especially in view of the fact that some previous recipients may drop out if they fail to submit the required final reports or return unspent funds.

A related issue that was discussed was the possibility of allowing tribes to submit more than one Basic grant application, as some tribes have more communities than can be served by a single library. However, it was recognized that it would be difficult to administer an expanded program, since the Department of the Interior only recognizes tribal entities; moreover, the amount of funds available to each tribe would be reduced if sub-units within tribes were eligible to apply independently.

Recommendations:

- Retain the three categories of grants – Basic, Technical Assistance and Enhancement;
- Provide a sample long-range plan and final report, or templates for plans and reports;
- Add language to guidelines and instructions for long-range plans and final reports to make clear to applicants that they have flexibility to reallocate funds as long as the money is used to provide library services and expenditures are documented; and,
- Consider expanding the purposes for which a Basic grant may be used.

Technical Assistance Grants

Terri Brown reviewed the history of the Technical Assistance grant program, which was started by IMLS as a new funding resource for tribes in 1998. Technical Assistance grants are non-competitive awards of up to $2,000 that are available under the same eligibility requirements as Basic grants. They are provided only to support existing operations. Funds are provided to enable a library to bring in an outside consultant to provide an onsite assessment of any or all of the library's operations. One-time extensions of up to one year are permitted. Required reports include a final performance report and a copy of the consultant's assessment report.

In 1998, IMLS awarded 42 Technical Assistance grants. IMLS has received 11 requests for extensions of these grants, but had received only seven final reports and six consultants' reports by the postmark deadline of December 31, 1999. In 1999, 38 Technical Assistance grants were awarded. Final reports for these grants are due December 31, 2000.

Terri asked for advice and assistance in finding ways to recruit appropriate consultants. Tribes prefer to hire consultants who live near them and who are familiar with their communities and needs, but it has been difficult to recruit such people in many areas. It was suggested that retired librarians, library development staff, school librarians or members of state library associations, might be sources for consultants. State library staff may be able to help identify consultants.

Discussion indicated that it is too soon to assess the success of the Technical Assistance program. Several participants felt that the program could become an important outreach tool to help tribes understand the benefits of having good library service. It was suggested that eligibility for the Technical Assistance program be expanded to include tribes wishing to plan for establishing a library. A question was raised as to whether it would be appropriate to allow Technical Assistance grants to be used to enable tribal

librarians to travel to obtain training. Discussion ensued about the possibility of using distance learning programs, or a mix of distance and face-to-face education, to meet the training needs of tribal librarians. However, some participants felt that it was essential for a consultant to see the site in order to make specific recommendations. They stressed the importance of having a consultant meet with tribal leaders to "sell" the importance of library services and provide the support of an outside expert.

Confusion was expressed about the term "Technical Assistance." Many applicants have interpreted it to mean assistance with purchasing equipment. The group suggested changing the name of the program, perhaps to "Professional Assessment" or "Professional Assistance."

Participants who had served as consultants to tribal libraries suggested that it would be helpful if tribes understood that consultants could provide advice on long-range plans (but not actually write the plan), and if consultants were provided with a list of the basic items that an overall assessment would include.

Recommendations:

- Continue the Technical Assistance program until more data on its usefulness is available;
- Change the name of the program to better convey its purpose;
- Contact state libraries and state library associations to solicit potential consultants;
- Consider expanding eligibility for the program to tribes wishing to establish library services;
- Consider expanding potential uses of grant funds to include training—and perhaps travel to obtain it—for library staff, but continue the primary emphasis on bringing consultants to the tribes; and,
- Provide grantees and consultants with a list of what should be included in a basic overall assessment.

Enhancement Grants

Terri Brown reviewed the history of the Enhancement grant program, formerly known as Special Project grants under the Department of Education. These grants are competitive and provide up to $150,000 for a maximum of two years to carry out activities related to the goals of LSTA, such as establishing electronic linkages between libraries, sharing resources among libraries, and targeting services to underserved communities.

Terri reported that even though the IMLS goal for the Enhancement grant program was to encourage the development of model projects that other libraries could emulate, or to provide services that would benefit tribal libraries at the regional or national level, in reality the projects funded to date have typically benefited only the grantee's community. The participants discussed the desirability of continuing the competitive program in view of this limitation. In general, participants felt that the competitive program should be continued in order to provide incentives to the tribes that are interested in library services.

Some participants felt that it is not realistic to expect tribal libraries to provide models, since each library is different and is responding to the needs of its own community.

Participants also discussed the possibility of limiting the number of consecutive times that a tribe could receive an Enhancement grant (such as two out of three years) as a way of spreading the opportunity for funding to a larger number of tribes. However, the participants felt that tribes that were competing successfully should not be penalized and urged that the competition remain open to all.

The question of providing assistance to libraries that are unsuccessful in obtaining Enhancement grants was discussed. It was suggested that state libraries or state library associations might be able to assist tribes by offering to read draft proposals.

Some participants suggested that IMLS consider reinstating the practice of the Department of Education of convening panel meetings in Washington, DC, to review competitive proposals rather than relying solely on field (mail) reviews. It was felt that panel discussions could help to distinguish sound proposals from ones that made a strong appeal but did not yet merit funding. IMLS staff felt that the Field Reviewer Handbook developed in 1999 has helped to resolve some early confusion on the part of field reviewers. Other participants suggested that IMLS consider convening annual meetings of Enhancement grant recipients in places other than Washington, DC. In that case, other tribal librarians could perhaps be invited, which could help to publicize the funded projects and share information with other tribes as well.

Recommendations:

- Continue the competitive program without restriction on the number of times a tribe could receive an award;
- Consider expending the potential project period for Enhancement grants to three years to allow for better planning by recipients;
- Contact state libraries and state library associations for volunteers to help tribes with Enhancement grant proposals;
- Consider convening grantee meetings outside of Washington, DC so that other tribal librarians may attend and learn about successful projects; and,
- Consider convening panel review meetings in Washington, DC.

Summary

In a final general discussion, Terri Brown reported that severe communication problems have frequently limited the effectiveness of the Native American program. Project directors often do not receive mail addressed to them. In other cases, project directors leave and IMLS is unable to contact appropriate staff. Several participants suggested using the AILA newsletter and listserv to publicize announcements and reports. IMLS has also recently established an electronic newsletter that could be used to communicate with grantees. Some suggested asking for the name of the project director's supervisor on application forms in order to get an additional contact name. The group thought that

state libraries and state or regional library associations could establish contacts with tribal libraries in their areas in order to share information and encourage greater involvement in local library organizations.

By the end of the day, the participants had discussed many issues relating to the Native American program and had provided input on the IMLS grant process. Participants agreed that, despite limited resources, all current programs serve needs of tribal libraries and should be continued. The Technical Assistance grant, however, should be re-evaluated once more data on its effectiveness is available.

Lotsee Patterson reminded everyone that the program needs to be able to provide evidence to Congress through statistical data and "success stories" of the important role that the Native American Library Services program plays in providing needed services in tribal communities.

IMLS greatly appreciated the input from the meeting participants and will continue the discussion on the feasibility of implementing the recommendations. This report will be posted on the IMLS web site for additional comment.